

Considering (Queer) Musicking Through Autoethnography

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Abstract: Queer musicking is integral to queer lives and becoming. With this notion in mind, this paper recounts some of my experiences of queer musicking in a rural space, in straight spaces, and in proximity to disparate bodies. Through this approach, I explore how autoethnography might provide a queer perspective to musicking, as well as locate instances of queer musicking and queer-within-musicking. These events are important in contemporary times, as it is these moments that remind queer people of our agency and non-queer people of the need for greater social and environmental justice.

Résumé : Pour les queer, musiquer fait partie intégrante de leur vie et de leur devenir. En gardant cette idée à l'esprit, cet article fait état de quelques-unes de mes expériences du musiquer queer dans un lieu rural, dans des lieux hétéros et à proximité de gens disparates. Par cette approche, j'examine en quoi l'auto-ethnographie peut procurer un point de vue queer au musiquer, ainsi que situer les cas de musiquer queer, et de queer au sein du musiquer. Ces événements sont importants à l'époque contemporaine, car ce sont ces moments qui rappellent aux personnes queer notre capacité d'agir et aux personnes non queer la nécessité d'une plus grande justice sociale et environnementale.

A theory of musicking, like the act itself, is not just an affair for intellectuals and “cultured” people but an important component of our understanding of ourselves and of our relationships with other people and the other creatures with which we share our planet. It is a political matter in the widest sense. (Small 1998: 13)

Queer lives are full of encounters. Indeed, it is these encounters that shape the queer individual, the queer body, the queer skin (Ahmed 2006; Jagose 1996). Musicking is one such encounter, which Christopher Small

reminds us is “not a thing at all but an activity, something people do” (1998: 2). Given that instances of musicking are inherently social and encompass not only performing but also listening, composing, and dancing (1998), these are encounters that will shape queer lives, generate queer objects, and fuel queer becoming.

In apprehending anything that is queer (or in attempting to locate the queer within something), autoethnography is not a futile approach, as “queer lives are the material foundation and the ‘so what’ of queer” (Holman Jones and Harris 2019: 59). Rather than simply describing experiences of the individual, autoethnography places the “me” within the “we.” It is a critical endeavour that generates cultural dialogues from the standpoint of the insider researcher.¹ Further, in *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories*, Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis point out that autoethnography may be viewed as “‘queering’ social science” (2016: 60):

We sanctioned writing in the first person; we approved of research in which the researcher became a principle object of research; we summoned stories that give voice to groups of people traditionally left out of social science inquiry ... we discouraged jargon and celebrated erotic and close to the bone prose in which knowledge is delivered through emotional arousal, identification, and self-examination rather than abstraction and explanation” (60).

Hence, queer practices and autoethnography are both “deconstructive skepticism[s] about the workings of reality, power, identity, and experience” (Adams and Holman Jones 2011: 108) that “attempt to disrupt traditional and dominant ideas about what passes as ‘normal’” (110). In this way, the binary of theoretical and personal is subverted in autoethnography, such that the two “work together in a collaborative dance” (Holman Jones 2016: 229). In other words, autoethnography can be queer. This is not to suggest that autoethnography is exclusive to queer individuals; instead, it is to say that the research approach can be queer in the sense that it can potentially examine dominant culture and be deconstructive and disruptive rather than “advocating a White [sic], masculine, heterosexist, middle/upper-class, Christian, able-bodied perspective” (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011: 275).

How, then, might autoethnography provide a queer perspective to musicking? Queer is more than just another term for the LGBTI community. Ahmed (2006) gives the etymology of queer as “from the Greek for cross, oblique, adverse,” that which is slanting (161), or that which has been twisted (Ahmed 2006; see also Butler 2011 [1993]). Following the concept of “being adverse toward” delivers a politics, body, and process of becoming that disturbs heteronormativity² and

binaries (Ahmed 2006; Holman Jones and Harris 2019; Jagose 1996). But this politics must not be confounded with homonormativity, a politics that, as Lisa Duggan contests, “does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, politicized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (2003: 50). Gladney-Hatcher adds that “in some ways, [homonormativity] defines the contemporary moment of LGBT ‘politics’” (2015: 9). A queer (autoethnographic) perspective to musicking, then, would locate that which disturbs heteronormativity (and homonormativity) or that which is at a slant to the conventional path in an instance of musicking.

I draw on Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), which is not simply concerned with “generating queer objects” (3) but, instead, is a paradigm “that faces the back” (29) to find what is oblique within phenomenology and give support to “those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place” (179). An approach, then, that embraces a queer phenomenology is political, such that a *queer* autoethnographic approach to my experiences will politicize these moments of lived experience (Adams and Holman Jones 2010, 2011; Holman Jones and Harris 2019). Because *my* experiences, are *your* experiences, are *our* experiences (Adams and Holman Jones 2011), because your experiences might be reflected in my experiences and my experiences might be reflected in your experiences or our experiences, because together as a queer community we share these stories, queer autoethnography might elucidate the political within queer musicking.

What follows are stories regarding some of my experiences of being a young queer male composer and performing musician who grew up in a rural Australian town and now resides in Brisbane, Australia. I use this storying approach to explore how autoethnography can elucidate queerness in music. Drawing on Adams and Holman Jones (2011), Hodges (2015), and Pelias (2000), who have all used this technique in their work, I — somewhat unusually — write some of my autoethnographic stories in second-person perspective to tease out similarities in queer experiences and break down a possible hierarchical binary between (authoritative) researcher and (passive) reader. In other words, writing autoethnographic stories in the second-person brings to the fore the notion that my experiences might be another queer individual’s experiences.

Apprehending Queerness

You push open the door of your favourite café in your rural hometown in Queensland, Australia. Walking in, a table of people cease their conversation to stare at you. Is it your slightly feminine gait? Or the t-shirt you are wearing

featuring Bowie as Aladdin Sane? Perhaps it is the short pink shorts, the Doc Marten boots, or the rainbow striped socks pulled high. Or maybe it is all of these things that make the air of a café change as you walk in. You smile to yourself and strut toward the counter.

I am my mother's child.

I have her dark hair, her dark eyes, her long eyelashes, her build. Friends of the family tell me I have her strong voice.

I have likeness to my mother. And I have likeness to my father and brother. It is this likeness that compels people to remark: "They are family" (Ahmed 2006).

But familial likeness can be problematized. As with gender categories and injurious names that "lay their claim on us prior to our full knowing" (Butler 2011 [1993]: 174), "we are affected by [familial likeness] ... before we have any sense ... [or] any understanding" of what it means to be like our family (Ahmed 2016: 484-485). We are given familial likeness, or what Ahmed calls "a path well trodden" (2006: 16): a line to be followed that our family and society have laid for us. Physically, this line might colour my hair grey before I am middle-aged as with the other men in my mother's family. Because of this line, I am my mother's child.

Why, then, are the three tradesmen walking behind my friend and me, as we walk to a Brisbane bus station, calling me a fag? No, not *calling* me this pejorative name. Rather, they are yelling it. We quicken our pace. I will not let the tears brimming under my lower eyelids escape.

Instead, I remind myself that these men can apprehend me, however, they are unable to recognize me. Given that "a life has to be intelligible *as a life*, has to conform to certain conceptions of what a life is, in order to become recognizable" (Butler 2009: 7; emphasis in original), my deviation from the "straight" familial line (Ahmed 2006) makes me *un*-recognizable to some. My deviation makes "some things become reachable ... [while] others remain or even become out of reach" (14). Indeed, it is because the three men walking behind me have conformed to the straight line given to them that they apprehend me as the Other. I am alien to them.

Consider the etymology of alien: from the Latin for "belonging to another" or simply "other" (Oxford Dictionaries n.d.). The remnants of last night — my embodiment of non-normative gender while musicking — signal to these men that I have deviated from the straight line, that I belong to another — another world, another space. I am an-Other.

For this reason, I am my mother's *alien-child*. I have likeness to my mother and my family but my deviation from the straight line given to me generates something other about me. To the three tradesmen walking behind me, my lifeworld is unintelligible. So while I might meet with hereditary diabetes later in life because of the straight familial line given to me, other paths in my life — those that I *choose* to take — are alien to this straight line and to the tradesmen.

Queer Musicking in Straight Space

Queer adorns my face. It adorns my body as I perform, musicking with my saxophone amongst mostly straight performers (see Figures 1 and 2). Musicking as my mother's *alien-child* in a rural space.

Given that many rural spaces are seen by some scholars to be heteronormative (Annes and Redlin 2012; Bell and Valentine 1995; Gorman-Murray, Waitt, and Gibson 2008; Kramer 1995), perhaps my queer body is out of place; perhaps I cannot extend into this space (Ahmed 2006). Then again, other scholars might ask me to muse on “what rurality can do rather than on what happens to queer people in rural locales,” given that “queer,



Fig. 1. Me as I performed with a local band in my rural hometown in September 2017. Photograph by my father. Used with permission.



Fig. 2. Me performing with members of a local band in my rural hometown in September 2017. Photograph by my father. Used with permission.

urban, and modern have been braided together to great effect” (Crawford 2017: 908; see also Gray, Johnson, and Gilley 2016). In his influential book *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*, Scott Herring deconstructs the image of “the metropolitan as the terminus of queer world making” (2010: 4). Urbanity as a telos for queer people underpins what Halberstam terms metronormativity: “a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance [the city] after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy [rurality]” (2005: 36-37). In this sense, the city becomes “an urban mecca” (Herring 2010: 14). In imagining a disruption to this imbrication of not-queer with rurality and of queerness with urban spaces, I wonder what my queer musicking might afford in this rural space tonight?

As Halberstam suggests, “we might find that rural and small-town environments *nurture* elaborate sexual cultures even while sustaining surface social and political conformity” (2005: 35; emphasis added). In his reading of photographer Michael Meads’s collections *Alabama Souvenirs* and *Eastaboga*, Herring finds the possibility of these elaborate sexual cultures in rural Alabama. Commenting on these collections, which capture young rural men (whose sexuality is unknown) in what the spectator can perceive as either the aftermath or the possibility of homoerotic encounters, he tells us that “the uneasiness that Meads’s images provoke is best read as a reply to the taxonomic presumptions

that inform many metronormative queer communities today” (2010: 103). Rurality, then, is not of necessity a heteronormative or homophobic space. Rather, it can be the taxonomic presumptions, which Halberstam argues are the cause of a metronormative narrative and which Meads engages with in his photographic collections of young rural men, that incite these dominant urban beliefs about rural places.

On stage, the lead singer of the band calls for me to do a solo. My eyes close as I begin, the notes and my thoughts tinged with queer desire. The musicking encounter brings my queer body and the queer body of the other saxophonist into proximity with the bodies of the other performers, bodies I know to be straight. From this nearness emerges a queerness (Ahmed 2006) much like that archived in Meads’s *Alabama Souvenirs* and *Eastaboga*, because, as Small reminds us: “Like all human encounters, [musicking] takes place in a physical and social setting, and those, too, have to be taken into account when we ask what meanings are being generated by a performance” (1998: 10). In remembering that my body travels along a different line, I read this musicking encounter as bringing what was traveling along different lines — queer and straight bodies — together. This itself generates a queerness because the straight line and the queer line have touched. As such, while my musicking is already queer, the band’s musicking becomes queer. And this queerness is brought closer to the bodies of the audience — bodies whose sexualities are unknown to me, but that even through my queer lens take on a presumed heterosexuality under normative logics — so much so that the musicking of these bodies also becomes queer as they groove along to the high energy music. In other words, my alien body disturbs the norm and, for a moment, there exists a fleeting queer space.

This queer space, and more importantly this queer musicking, is political. In some ways, it is rurality itself that has afforded these queer possibilities: it is the “temporal ‘regressions,’ ‘slownesses,’ or ‘standstills’ ... [the] recursive rewritings, be they earnest or self-consciously citational, of times that are seen, from the perspective of the urban cutting edge of modernity, as already over and useless” that place rurality “out of time” (Crawford 2017: 915). A rural setting, then, is “a time and place where everything is slightly out of kilter” (Soderling 2016: 333), a time and place where musicking with queer possibilities can exist. To use Halberstam’s idea of “failure” from *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), rurality fails to be urbanity, and rural queer people fail to attend to the tropes of metronormativity. But (queer) failure in this sense is not something to be abhorred; rather, (queer) failure might “offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2-3). In the failure of rurality to be “fast-paced,” “modern,” “cutting-edge,” “in-the-know,” and “trendy,” it allows rural queer individuals to eschew the stifling bounds of metronormativity and

homonormativity. In other words, the temporality of rurality creates and allows for queerness.

In this fleeting queer rural space where I musick tonight, failures abound. I perform with a band that fails to be “cutting-edge,” “trendy,” or “modern.” And given that rehearsals fail to start on time, the band is neither punctual nor “fast-paced.” Tonight, the crowd we perform to fails to live out dominant urban presumptions about rurality because they fail to chant homophobic comments when they watch me walk onto the stage, unlike the tradesmen who, in the past, have called me a faggot as I walked along a metropolitan street. And tonight, I have failed: I have failed to commit to memory my parts for each song (even though I have been playing most for close to six years). I have failed to play every note correctly; I have failed to be homonormative and, thus, palatable for a normative audience. I have failed to be anything but queer.

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The little man switches from red to green and my two friends and I cross the road. Excitement for the gig we are heading to flows through and between our three bodies.

As we reach the next crossing, a drunken man walks up to us, phone in hand.

“Say hi to my friend,” he tells us, extending the hand holding his phone toward us.

My friends and I look at each other. We don’t want to say hi to his friend. We just want to walk to this gig without being hassled.

The man looks at me: “Come on, you fucking drag queen. Say hi.”

After one of my friends assures him I am not a drag queen, he continues with: “Come on, you glorious homosexual. Just say hi to my friend.”

Once again, someone has apprehended my body as being that of my mother’s-alien-child, but they cannot recognize me. Like the encounter with the three tradesmen, this encounter has happened in an urban street.

Spaces acquire an orientation or direction — we might even say, a sexuality — through the bodies that inhabit them and the actions these bodies perform (Ahmed 2006). The same performativity that Judith Butler articulates as a “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural being” (2014 [1990]: 43-44) that is called gender, is what Gill Valentine argues has heterosexualized the urban street. In the urban street:

This repetition takes the form of many acts: from heterosexual couples kissing and holding hands as they make their way down the street, to advertisements and window displays which present images of contented “nuclear” families; and from heterosexualized conversations that permeate queues at bus stops and banks, to the piped music articulating heterosexual desires that fill shops, bars, and restaurants. (Valentine 1996: 145)

To these heterosexual acts that Valentine contends have shaped the sexuality of urban streets, I add the words spoken by the man on this urban street and the homophobia of the three tradesmen on another urban street. This is not to suggest that *all* urban streets are straight — the straightness (or, alternatively, the lack of straightness) of these streets is informed by what is happening and what has happened there. Oxford Street in Sydney, the streets of Greenwich Village, and Old Compton Street in London are hardly straight streets. Likewise, the Stonewall Inn in New York and the Beat Megaclub in Brisbane are not straight interior spaces. But the pervasiveness of heterosexuality can sexualize many streets as straight.

The presumed straightness of public streets has a history. Paul Preciado, for example, argues that the straightening of streets intensified in the mid-20th century when “what had until then been considered private burst onto the public sphere” (2014 [2010]: 26) through pornography and, in particular, *Playboy* magazine. Able to be purchased (and viewed) in public and targeted at white heterosexual men, *Playboy* perhaps performed a crucial role in eroticizing the urban street. Through the dissemination of images (of naked women and of interior architecture), the binaries of interior/exterior, clothed/naked, private/public, secrecy/disclosure, guarded/exposed, and casual/erotic were broken down (2014 [2010]), and this allowed for something that had traditionally been thought only proper in the bedroom — heterosexual desire — to mark public spaces, including the urban street.

As my friends and I arrive at the venue, and I am giving my ticket to the person at the door, I wonder what heterosexual acts — erotic or otherwise — I will see at this gig.

Inside, we buy drinks, greet other friends, and catch up on each other’s lives.

The band we have come to see walks on stage. Our collective excitement is palpable. Hearing music “in the flesh is an experience of another kind” (Small 1998: 1). We leave our table and walk to the front of the dance floor; we are not ones to forego an opportunity to dance. Our feet move as the music begins. The three of us move in circles, jump, hold hands, smile at each other.

We are dancing but I am unsure as to whether my body extends into this space. Because I am queer. Perhaps my body does not extend in this space, or does not have the shape of this space. Perhaps the space cannot extend me. In a straight space, such as the urban street I was walking along before, a queer body *is dis-*oriented (Ahmed 2006). The queer body in the straight space appears at a slant, or perhaps, for the queer body, it is the straight space (and the straight world) that is oblique. In either case, the effect is that of disorientation.

So, perhaps, as I dance as my mother's-alien-child, and as my friends dance with me, and as the band plays together, we generate a queer space. Much as when I musicked months ago with a band in rural space, or as when I collaborate with a straight performer in the coming months, our collective musicking tonight — in which bodies and lifeworlds touch — twists this space and manifests queer possibility. The music being performed becomes more than rough distortion and relentless bass sonorities — it becomes a medium for creating a queer community.

Midnight Rain

You and I are approaching each other as we walk down a hallway of our university.

You — a pianist.

Me — an openly queer man who once page turned for you in a concert.

You — a pianist who, as you get closer to me, cast your eyes to the ground. Because my queerness offends you.

As we pass each other, I can see the revulsion in your skin because my queer body is disagreeable with your heteronormative body and beliefs.

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The piano is a queer object.

It is what you and I are gathered around tonight as we premiere our collaboration: your feminist poetry and the music for piano and electronics I spent months writing after you, a close friend, asked if I would be interested in setting your words to music. On stage you are a straight body and I am my mother's-alien-child.

The piano is queer because it supports a closeness between those who travel different lines (Ahmed 2006): a straight body and a deviant body. As we perform, it is as if we walk alongside each other; it is as if we walk arm in arm; indeed, we generate queerness.

You reach the second movement of our collaboration — *Midnight Rain* — and the piano is queered yet again as you begin to pluck its strings. You

bring what is in the background to the fore. The strings that previously only supported the operation of the piano have now been brought to the fore of the audience's attention. An otherwise small object that stood in the background has been noticed.

Ahmed asks: "Is a queer chair one that is not so comfortable, so we move around in it, trying to make the impression of our body reshape its form?" (2006: 168).

In developing this collaboration, you and I were uncomfortable, discontent with the piano and wanted more. We moved away from convention. We fidgeted. We shifted in our chair. We took notice of the object and remoulded it.³ We queer the piano strings by "bringing [the] objects to life in their 'loss' of place, in the failure to keep them in their place" (Ahmed 2006: 165). Indeed, because of your plucking and striking with mallets, the strings deviate from the line given to them. With this (queer) failure comes (queer) life and otherwise inaccessible (queer) opportunities (Halberstam 2011) as the strings suddenly impress upon you, me, and the audience. The strings become alien.

And what of the space we — you, the audience, me — are musicking in? Is it a straight space? A queer space?

The room we are in is one of many in this building. Walking through the hallways of this university-based music institute, I cause some people to avert their gaze: because my queerness offends their heteronormative beliefs. Are the hallways, then, a straight space or, worse, a heteronormative space? A straight space would be open for a queer individual to inhabit — although in a disoriented manner — whereas a heteronormative space would work to keep the same individual out. More importantly, is the building a straight space or a heteronormative space?

So many musicking encounters between so many different bodies happen in this building. Queer bodies, straight bodies, white bodies, bodies of colour, bodies differently abled. After myriad encounters and actions, what shape has this building taken on? I would argue that because of this history it cannot be straight.

How will our encounter tonight (and the actions we perform) reshape this room and this building? How will the queer piano reshape this room and this building?

The answer is in your words as you abruptly stop playing the piano as part of the performance: "instants of shattering / then obscurity."

Our queerness is disorienting, obscuring in this space. Or is the room obscured because of our queerness? Tonight, the room is undoubtedly queer because of the encounters and our queer piano. And our actions, my music,

and your poetry are certainly disorienting. We have re-moulded — reshaped — the space we are musicking within, just as we will soon reshape the music. The building then — the university-based music institute in which some people lower their gaze when walking past me because of their heteronormativity — becomes a fleetingly queer space.

We reach the penultimate movement of the collaboration. Because of my composition process, the audience is made to look back at the music they have heard over the past hour. We place them in a metaphorical queer chair by the means of William S. Burroughs's cut-up technique:

The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth in and out fore and aft like an innaresting [*sic*] sex arrangement... (Burroughs 2016 [1959]: 191)

For Burroughs, The Word — language conventions — had control over humanity (Robinson 2011), much like how binaries (gender, race, sexual, human/non-human) can be restrictive in contemporary society. My use of the cut-up technique is a refusal of this restriction. This cut-up deviation has parallels with trans performance artist and gender theorist Kate Bornstein's self-identification: "Both my identity and fashion are based on collage. You know — a little bit from here, a little bit from there? Sort of a cut-and-paste thing" (2016 [1994]: 5). Much as Bornstein's theatre work follows her "patchwork gender" such that it "consists of elements [she] gather[s] along the way" (188), in the penultimate movement of our collaboration, the music that has been presented over the past hour is re-presented in a new order governed by chance. You and I re-mould (or queer) the music to eliminate any chance of a restrictive gaze, and the audience takes notice.

In our collective look back, our line — the path we were directed down — becomes skewed. In re-moulding the music, you and I "do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity'" (Burroughs 2016 [1959]: 184): we do not presume to impose the straight line. In this penultimate movement, the audience, you, and I are deviants as we step off the straight line. Indeed, we queer our direction in our musicking. The audience, then, is queer as they move down a non-straight path in a queer space.

The queer piano supports this deviation. Because as Ahmed reminds us, "It is not only that queer surfaces support action, but also that the action they support involves shifting grounds, or even clearing a new ground, which allow us to tread a different path" (2006: 170). Our queering of the piano — and the queer contact it enables — supports our looking back when we move along a

different — non-straight — path. This queer instrument also clears the ground for new (queer) actions and new (queer) possibilities.

Indeed, our collaboration — our musicking — has centred on re-moulding, on taking deviant paths. But this should come as no surprise. Because you noticed the furniture in our (queer) performance space: you found sitting on a piano stool while performing uncomfortable. So, tonight, you have performed on a chair: a queer chair. A physical queer chair next to the metaphorical queer chair in which we have placed the audience. In your chair, you have moved, shuffled, sweated: you have taken notice of this object (an object that is normally in the background) and given it (queer) life.

Where We're Going

In an article examining lesbian participation in North American *taiko* (a form of Japanese drumming) for a special issue of *Women and Music*, Angela K. Ahlgren writes that: “five short-haired women without makeup, wearing uniforms that emphasize the broadness of their shoulders, with body types that range from rail-thin to plump, whose confidence appears unwavering — these qualities open up queer possibilities” (2016: 16). These women open up queer possibilities insofar as they subvert gender *performativity*⁴ with a *performance* that is non-normative. As with my own experiences of performing with a band in a rural space, dancing in a space that had an unknown sexuality, and premiering *Midnight Rain*, queerness is generated through the re-moulding (or disturbance) of conventions. But what *potentialities* might these queer possibilities open? The difference between a possibility and a potentiality is given by José Esteban Muñoz:

Possibilities exist, or more nearly, they exist within a logical real, the possible, which is within the present and is linked to presence. Potentialities are different in that although they are present, they do not exist in present things. Thus, potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present but, more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity. (2009: 99)

In other words, possibilities are the here-and-now, whereas a potentiality is the not-here-and-now. Potentialities are the yet-to-be: the queer not-yet (Holman Jones and Harris 2019; Muñoz 2009). For Ahmed, these potentialities are presently beyond our horizon, as “objects are objects insofar as they are within my horizon ... [and] the horizon marks the edge of what can be reached by the

body” (2006: 55). As such, a possibility is the object that is within our horizon: it is something that can be grasped, and it may even have tangibility. For the five short-haired women above, the taiko drums on which they play are a tangible possibility, the music they produce with these drums is also a possibility. Their dress is a queer possibility through the disturbance and re-moulding of gender norms. The queer piano is a queer possibility.

How might possibilities bring forth (queer) potentialities? Moreover, how might queer possibilities within (queer) musicking generate queer potential? Remembering that queerness is disorienting, it is reasonable to suggest that queer possibilities generate new paths. Because, as Ahmed reminds us, “In order to become orientated, you might suppose that we must first experience *disorientation*” (2006: 5; emphasis added). Queer, then, as a cause of disorientation, is an orientation device, inasmuch as one must find a new path, having been thrown from the previous one. The fall from the old path is “the making present of something that is now absent (the presence of an absence)” (158). In other words, queer possibilities throw us from our path and might make an absence reachable. This absence — a void waiting to be filled — is queer potential.

It is not that the queer piano and the queer women taiko performers must destroy to make way for this queer void. Rather, these acts of queer musicking disrupt to create, and foster, the queer void. The queer piano is no longer just an instrument with an established history in Western art music, but a vehicle for bringing together disparate bodies. Furthermore, along with queer musicking in rural spaces, the queer piano brings attention to that which has previously been unnoticed.

At the same time, this attention should not be confused with that which is afforded by homonormativity. In a world where *Queer Eye* upholds stereotypes of gay men, where Pride month is appropriated as a marketing ploy, and in which Taylor Swift releases *You Need to Calm Down* — a song that parallels the heavy critique she has received throughout her career with homophobia — it can be said that homonormativity has been assimilated into heteronormativity.

On the other hand, the queer attention I argue for in this article is one that considers the “loser” rather than the “winner” (Halberstam 2011); it is an attention to the small or “degenerate” life forms, such as the piano strings or bodies that make an instrument, a street, or a performance space a little less straight; it is a way of seeing in the world that looks to the sexual other, the racial other, the gender other.

As such, it must be remembered that homonormativity does not simply present a palatable and intelligible depiction of lesbian and gay culture; it is also one that is predominately white. This intersectionality of homonormativity

and whiteness must be considered when critiquing homonormativity as the oppressions meted out against racial others, sexual others, and gender others are interconnected (Carbado et al. 2013). Jasbir Puar, in her article “Mapping US Homonormativities” (2006), gives an insightful analysis of the intersectionality of racism and queerphobia (and homonormativity) in an episode of the satirical American cartoon TV show *South Park*. In the episode, the assistant to gay teacher Mr. Garrison — Mr. Slave — is “a figure of sexual transgression and perversity” (82) who is mistaken by white students to be a Pakistani. For Puar, this is “a curious suturing of racial and sexual difference — the perverse leather man, unrecognized as such by students, is instead mistaken for another historically salient figure of perversion, the Muslim Other of Orientalist fame” (82). In other words, the white students perceive no difference between racial and sexual otherness precisely because homonormativity “foreclose[s] the potentiality and viability of other (non-homonormative) ways of life” (Gladney-Hatcher 2015: 10). It attends to some bodies but is blind to others.

The potential-filled voids generated by queer musicking are an antidote of the political kind to heteronormativity *and* homonormativity. Indeed, the epigraph above from Christopher Small argues that musicking is political. More importantly, Small highlights that musicking provides a way of understanding ourselves and others. I would suggest, then, that queer musicking brings attention to *all* parties that have been ignored, and perhaps still are: not only queer people, but also those who are not white, able-bodied, or normative in any other ways. And looking back to the epigraph from Small, queer musicking can also aid in our understanding of and bring attention to “the other [non-human] creatures with which we share our planet” (1998: 13). This is not to suggest — or worse, condone — the straightening, whitening, or manipulation of these groups. Rather, it is to say that queer musicking allows what has been put in the background by hegemonic culture to step forward. It might even give a voice to those groups and entities that cannot speak for themselves, such as animals and the environment. Queer musicking looks back. It is queer people recognizing the agency we have and not being ignorant of our responsibility to use it.

However, our agency as deviants from heteronormativity (and homonormativity) can function in ostensibly straight musicking as well. Returning to my experience of musicking with a band in a rural space, the band was not a queer band; instead, two members were queer: myself and another saxophonist. Our presence was disorienting to the musicking and the space, such that each became fleetingly queer. This fleetingness is attended to through the parenthesized queer in the title of this article. (Queer) recognizes the possible unintentionality (or unknowingness) of the queering process in a musicking

encounter. This fleeting queerness is important for fueling potentialities and it is encounters such as this that must be looked for and recognized. For it is encounters such as this that disrupt the status quo by enabling non-queer individuals to recognize the possible queer within their everyday lives.

Indeed, it is autoethnography that can place the queer within the everyday and within musicking encounters. Everyday queer musicking must, then, not be forgotten or placed to the side: listening as a queer individual to music that spruiks (an Australian colloquialism meaning “to promote”) heterosexual desire; dancing with a queer body in a straight space; attending a concert with a queer body. These encounters and experiences are everyday queer musicking: moments filled with queer potential experienced by a “queer we.” As such, I suggest that queer people experience and do queer musicking every day, and that our experiences are the same. Because queer musicking is not experienced by one person but is collective. My experiences of musicking as my mother’s-alien-child could be another queer person’s experiences of musicking as their mother’s-alien-child. Within straight spaces, we are aliens; within musicking, we can be catalysts for a collective queerness. And autoethnography locates this queerness.

For this reason, autoethnographies of queer musicking are potentialities. These stories are monuments to what has “often been omitted or forgotten by history” (Holman Jones and Harris 2019: 16). Through these stories, we turn away from mainstream culture in favour of that which has gone unnoticed and, yet, is present in our everyday lives. Muñoz tells us that “the presentation of this sort of anecdotal and ephemeral evidence grants entrance and access to those who have been locked out of official histories and, for that matter, ‘material reality’” (1996: 9). We look to what is marginalized in the present to imagine a not-yet.

Through my own autoethnographic stories, I have located instances of queer musicking, moments which allow me, and possibly other queer individuals, to imagine a queer not-yet. At the time of writing — a pre-pandemic time — I was a queer person in their early twenties and, as such, that youth, along with my growing up in a rural Australian town, is reflected in my stories and allows me to offer you — the reader — a novel perspective on queer musicking and the queer not-yet. After previous work in queer academia, I look to where queer theory and — more importantly for my own research — queer musicking can go now. Following the rise of work in queer autoethnography, this article is an act of the intersection between queer musicking and autoethnography that brings to the fore the radical possibilities the latter can find within moments of (queer) musicking. With this in mind, exploring the intersection of queer musicking with other academic disciplines, as well as societal and environmental

issues, through autoethnography can undoubtedly help us better understand the efficacy of queer musicking in non-queer settings and movements. By doing so, we — queer and non-queer people alike — move one step closer to a more mutually beneficial relationship between our society and the environment and healthier relationships between different groups within our society. 🍀

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Notes

1. See, for example: Bartleet 2009; Bartleet and Ellis 2009; Bochner 2012; Bochner and Ellis 2016; Draisey-Collishaw 2012; Ellis 1993, 2004; Ellis and Bochner 2006; Holman Jones 2016; Holman Jones and Harris 2019; Richardson 2016.

2. Heteronormativity and heterosexuality are not synonymous terms. Whereas heterosexuality is the sexual object choice, heteronormativity is the oppression of minority sexual identities through “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent — that is, organized as a sexuality — but also privileged” (Berlant and Warner 1998: 548). It must not be forgotten, however, that heterosexuality — the conventional path — can still straighten or stereotype queerness. In an attempt to increase queer visibility, mainstream drama shows such as *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girl* are the first to come to mind as presenting queer individuals as being like heterosexual individuals to make them palatable for a mainstream audience. At the same time, *Queer Eye* perpetuates stereotypes of queer men as being equally obsessed with fashion and working out at the gym, ideas that are again (dangerously) palatable for a mainstream audience.

3. I do not wish to suggest here that the plucking or striking of piano strings is unique to *Midnight Rain*. Instead, I read our plucking and striking of piano strings as a queer practice whereby the action is a (queer) failure to keep the strings on the straight line given to them — that is, background support for the operation of the piano.

4. Rather than being a voluntary performance of gender traits, Judith Butler sees performativity as the everyday actions (along with views from other people) that cement our gender as that which was given at birth. This reassertion of a prescribed gender is one way in which an individual can remain on the straight line given by the conventional family.

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